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# BusinessWeek

## November 7, 2008

### The Best Places to Raise Your Kids

#### A Chicago suburb beats out thousands of other communities around the U.S. as the best, most affordable place to raise kids

By Prashant Gopal

Mount Prospect, Ill., is a quiet Chicago suburb with a population of just over 56,000. It is a tight-knit town where over the past eight years Prospect High School's football team won three state championships, its Marching Knights picked up their 26th straight grand champion title at the annual state marching band festival, and just last month the school itself ranked 12th among all state high schools. Now the town is also the winner of *Businessweek's* second annual roundup of the Best Places in America to Raise Kids.

Founded by German immigrants and incorporated in 1917, Mount Prospect hasn't strayed far from its values of fiscal conservatism and community involvement, even as it has expanded to include new immigrants from Poland, Mexico, Korea, and India. It is a middle-class community with low crime, affordable homes, award-winning schools, ethnic restaurants, a major regional mall, and a small-town charm that makes the big city less than an hour away seem much farther away.

You won't find palatial estates here—let alone McMansions. People generally live in modest homes with short driveways that touch the yards next door. And residents here have been known to share power generators after storms and take turns cooking meals for sick friends and acquaintances. "I knew one girl who had back surgery," said Jean Murphy, a correspondent for the *Daily Herald*, suburban Chicago's largest daily newspaper. Murphy, who has covered Mount Prospect since 1983, said: "She had six weeks where she didn't have to cook. That's the kind of town it is."

#### Best Affordable Towns

*BusinessWeek* teamed up with OnBoard Informatics, a Manhattan-based provider of real estate analysis, to come up with our list of each state's best affordable towns for raising

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children. Mount Prospect just squeezed out several other Cook County (Ill.) communities, many of which also ranked high. The most important factors in our analysis was school performance, affordability, and safety. But we also gave weight to cost of living, air quality, job growth, racial diversity, and local parks, ball fields, zoos, recreation centers, museums, and theaters.

We knocked out towns with populations of fewer than 50,000 and median household incomes of less than \$40,000 or more than \$100,000. And we ended up with a list that included some well-known places such as Phoenix, Columbus, Ohio, and Ann Arbor, Mich. But we also found some hidden gems such as Euless, Tex., smack in between Dallas and Fort Worth, which according to *Sports Illustrated* has the nation's top-ranked high school football team, and Murfreesboro, Tenn., a college town outside Nashville.

It wasn't a perfect list. Our population threshold of 50,000 people limited our options in less-populous states such as Delaware, Vermont, and West Virginia. But our criteria helped us find ethnically and culturally diverse places with the kind of amenities that are more often found in population centers. "We have 19 parks and have one park for all ball fields so mothers don't have to scramble from one park to another with their children," said Mary Lib Saleh, who has been mayor of Euless for 15 years. "We are a city of 54,000 and have almost 100 floats in the Christmas parade—as many as Fort Worth or Dallas. We just have a community, and people really love Euless."

### **College Town**

Murfreesboro, home to Middle Tennessee State University, the largest undergraduate university in the state, hosts a jazz and a folk music festival in the summer and most major high school sports championships. It has expansive sports fields, including a new \$13 million soccer complex. The economic downturn has started to hurt Murfreesboro as it has other parts of the country. But college towns tend to ride out recessions better than most places because education is somewhat recession-proof. "We have a small town feel with big city amenities right here in our community being a city of 100,000 people," said Rob Lyons, deputy city manager for Murfreesboro. "And Nashville being a half hour drive away opens up other recreational, cultural opportunities, and professional sports."

Mount Prospect, like many of our selections, is a village where children study hard but also pack their afternoons, evenings, and weekends with sports, music, and other extracurricular activities. Prospect High School Principal Kurt Laakso said the area's schools regularly outperform more affluent districts largely because of a tradition of parental involvement and dedication on the part of teachers and administrators who are well paid, but not outrageously so. "We have a good balance of academic rigor and the social aspect that makes high school memorable," said Jason Block, an English teacher at the high school who also serves as faculty adviser for the student newspaper. "They are at an elite high school here. And it's preparing them really well for next step. At the same time, it's not out of whack here, where it's all academic all the time. Prospect High School is not a stress factory."

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## Mount Prospect's Downtown

But Mount Prospect isn't just some quaint throwback. It is changing quickly. Recent immigrants are opening stores and restaurants, including a regionally known Flamingo's Fine Mexican Seafood. The city has worked hard to revitalize its downtown, bringing in condos, new stores, and restaurants such as the Blues Bar, a "Blues Brothers"-themed bar that features live entertainment and a replica of the "bluesmobile" featured in the 1980 cult movie. (Dan Aykroyd's character, Elwood Blues, famously says of the police car: "I picked it up at the Mount Prospect City Police auction last spring.") The million-square-foot Randhurst Mall, the first in the Chicago area when it was built in 1962, is being remade into an outdoor lifestyle mall.

But the village's biggest pluses remain unchanged, including its proximity to Chicago and the airport, its employment opportunities related to the airport and a large corporate park, and its "street reputation" as a family-friendly community, said Tom Zander, who with his wife Mary co-owns Picket Fence Realty in downtown Mount Prospect.

Longtime Village Manager Michael Janonis said the town has not yet been hit hard by the economic crisis, largely because it has had few foreclosures and isn't depending too heavily on a single source of tax revenue. "We're not flashy," Janonis said. "It's not like other places that [have] huge increases in property values and huge crashes. We're very steady."

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## WRECK

# Teen riders in woman's SUV were terrified, affidavits say

**Brenda Rodgers could face fines and a maximum of two years in prison.**

By **DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR. and KATE GORMAN**  
ramirez@star-telegram.com, kgorman@star-telegram.com

**EULESS** — The eight teens who rode with a Euless mother accused of drunken driving told police they were terrified as her vehicle reached speeds of 95 mph on a freeway, according to arrest warrant affidavits released Friday.

The driver, Brenda Rodgers, 37, was arrested Thursday night at her Euless home, accused of drunken driving. Her twin daughters were among the teens in the vehicle. She was being held in the Euless Jail on Friday with bail set at \$100,000. Rodgers is expected to be charged with driving while intoxicated with a child, endangering a child and injury to a child, Euless police Lt. John Williams said Friday.

The eight teens were out to celebrate the twin girls' 15th birthday, which was the next day, said Gauge Murphy, boyfriend of one of the girls. About 10 p.m., one of the twins called their mother for a ride home, Murphy said. Rodgers sounded like she'd been drinking but told her daughters she'd had only three beers, Murphy said in a telephone interview last week.

But soon after they crowded into Rodgers' TrailBlazer, the teens realized they'd made a mistake, Murphy said. Rodgers nearly hit two people in the parking lot, and only tapped the brakes at stop signs, he said.

"We all started putting on our seat belts; I was the only one without a belt where I was sitting," said Murphy, who was sitting between two girls in the back row, according to the police report.

As she neared home, Rodgers "laughed hysterically" trying to run over a cat, he said. He said police told him the SUV rolled eight times after hitting a curb.

"Everyone tells you not to get in a car with a drunk driver," Murphy said. "They never tell you not to get in a car with your friend's drunk mom."



Rodgers

## The wreck

The crash happened on Rodgers' birthday, according to reports. She was driving a 2002 Chevrolet TrailBlazer southbound in the 1200 block of Donley Drive shortly before 10:30 p.m. Oct. 25. She told police she lost control of the vehicle when she swerved to miss a dog.

According to police reports, witnesses said she swerved to avoid a parked vehicle.

The TrailBlazer hit a curb, breaking a wheel and causing the SUV to roll over several times, police said. None of the passengers sitting in the middle or rear seat had their seat belts on, according to the affidavit.

The two boys and six girls were taken to hospitals in Irving and Grapevine, but there were no life-threatening injuries.

Three of the teens are 14 and five teens are 15 years old, according to police reports.

If convicted, Rodgers faces a maximum of two years in prison and a \$10,000 fine on each charge.

Police arrested Rodgers about 9:45 p.m. Thursday, hours after police got arrest warrants. She has no criminal history in Tarrant County.

Tests measured Rodgers' blood-alcohol level at 0.13 at the time of the accident, Williams said. The legal limit in Texas is 0.08.

Authorities said it took several days to arrest Rodgers because they had to wait for test results and investigators spent a few days with the Tarrant County district attorney's office to determine what charges would be filed.

The teens and their parents met at Murphy's home Oct. 26 to discuss the wreck, according to the affidavit.

Rodgers called one of her daughters who was attending the meeting and asked her daughter to lie for her and not to tell anyone she had been drinking or that she was drunk, the affidavit states.

## Crime Time

Want more crime news?  
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**OBITUARIES**

**Leroy Peppers**



**HURST** — Leroy Junior Peppers, 68, passed Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2008.

**FUNERAL:** 2 p.m. Monday at First Church of the Nazarene in Euless. Interment: Parker Memorial Cemetery in Grapevine. Visitation: 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday at Moore Funeral Home.

He was born Feb. 14, 1940. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Now he will join one son in heaven.

**SURVIVORS:** Leroy leaves behind a wife, Rosie; four daughters; two sons and their spouses; 24 grandchildren; and 19 great-grandchildren.

Moore Funeral Home-N. Davis Drive  
Arlington, 817-275-2711

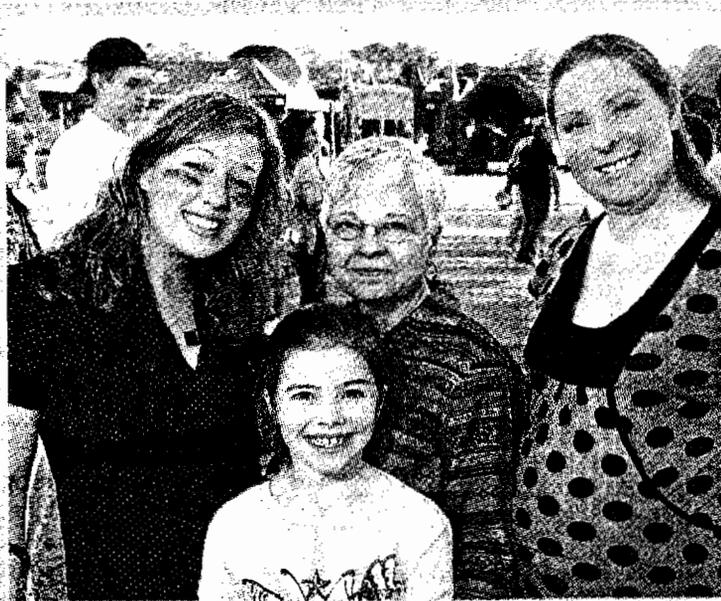
View and sign guestbook at  
[www.star-telegram.com/obituaries](http://www.star-telegram.com/obituaries)

Leroy worked for the City of Euless in the Public Works dept. from 1965 to 1991.

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**NORTHEAST CLICK**



Diana Kirby, Bayleigh Hall, Joyce Lennard and Belynda Webb



Kim Vargo and Caleb Vargo



**Eules Parks and Community Center show that Fruits & Veggies Aren't Scary**

The Eules Parks & Community entertained patrons and supporters with their Fruits & Veggies Aren't Scary Fest on Oct. 31 at the Midway Recreation Center in Eules.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBERT M. McAVOY

Tessa Valenzuela, Tyler Athans and Janet Bardin



Penny Hayden and Chris Hayden



Heidi Taylor, Cindy Montgomery and Michael Davenport

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COMMUNITIES

# For those raising children, Eules called the place to be

### Best places to raise kids

BusinessWeek magazine chose one city from each state as the best places to raise kids.

Among those chosen:

- Mount Prospect, Ill.
- Eules
- Phoenix
- Columbus, Ohio
- Ann Arbor, Mich.
- Murfreesboro, Tenn.
- Rio Rancho, N.M.
- Lawton, Okla.
- Bossier City, La.

To read more, go to [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com).

### What do you think?

Post a comment on this report at [star-telegram.com/comments](http://star-telegram.com/comments)



Ian Arrington and his wife, Vanessa, took their son Jamisen, 7 months, to West Park in Eules on Wednesday. STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

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**BusinessWeek ranks the city as among the most family-friendly.**

By ADRIENNE NETTLES  
 anettles@star-telegram.com

EULESS — Shubhadrika Dhakal loves the schools in Euless. And the parks.

Throw in a family-friendly atmosphere, and it's easy to see why she and her family have made their home in the Northeast Tarrant County city for the past three years.

"We go out to Midway Park where they can play, or the Midway Recreation Center where they learn gymnastics," she said of her two children, Shurav, 8, and daughter Anuka, 12.

*BusinessWeek* magazine agrees with Dhakal's assessment and has named Euless as one of the Best Places in America to Raise Your Kids for 2009. Communities on the list were ranked for such things as school performance, affordability, safety, air quality, job growth, racial diversity, local parks, ballfields, zoos, recreation centers, museums and theaters.

Mount Prospect, Ill., a Chicago suburb, was named the winner of the second annual rankings. One city from each state was recognized.

Euless Mayor Mary Lib Saleh boasted in the magazine article that the city's 19 parks and one central location for ballfields — The Parks at Texas Star — help make life easier for parents.

"In this time of economic downturn, keeping children busy at parks and ballfields helps families," she said.

The city's churches and public library are also a cornerstone in the community, with at least three public schools within walking distance of the library, Saleh said. Many children walk to the library after school, she said.

The magazine also notes that Trinity High School is among the nation's top-ranked football teams.

*BusinessWeek* limited its list to cities with populations of at least 50,000 and with median household incomes of \$40,000 to \$100,000. The magazine described Euless as a "hidden gem" nestled

between Dallas and Fort Worth with a population of 51,891 and a median household income of \$70,179.

Amenities such as The Parks at Texas Star with its "sports-plex for baseball, softball, tee ball, soccer, batting cages and a driving range" gave Euless an edge over other Texas cities such as Richardson and Mission, according to the magazine.

Online: [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)

ADRIENNE NETTLES, 817-390-7752

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## BusinessWeek picks Euless as one of the best affordable places in America to raise kids

09:01 PM CST on Thursday, November 13, 2008

By MARK NORRIS / The Dallas Morning News  
norrism@dallasnews.com

Useless? How about fab-Euless?

Those who look down on the city just west of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport may snicker at *BusinessWeek's* choice as one of the best affordable places in America to raise kids.

But residents say Euless, with its schools, affordability and parks, was a good pick.

Mayor Mary Lib Saleh, who said she didn't know Euless was under consideration for the honor, recalled a town-hall meeting after her election in 1989. A man there called the city "Useless."

"I told him, 'Sir, as long as I'm living, don't use that name anymore.'" Ms. Saleh said. "And now, people just don't use that anymore."

She said Euless has grown a lot since then. Earlier this year, it won a *Money* magazine award as one of the "best places to live."

"At one time we were a little more blue-collar city, but now we are so much more diversified," Ms. Saleh said.

So, what does *BusinessWeek* like about the city of 50,000-plus?

The rankings, which honored one city in every state, used real estate data to factor in school performance, the number of schools, household expenditures, diversity, crime rates, air quality, job growth, family income, museums, parks and theaters.

School performance and safety were weighted most heavily, along with affordability and amenities. Cities had to have at least 50,000 residents and a median family income between \$40,000 and \$100,000.

The magazine called Euless a "hidden gem" and cited its high school football team, the Trinity Trojans, which won the state championship last year.

J.R. Goad, a real estate agent who has lived in Euless for more than 30 years, said the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District is an important selling point for the city.

The biggest change Mr. Goad has seen over the years: the growing number of houses and developments springing up across the city.

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CRIME

# Six face trial in ID theft ring that targeted two Texas bases

By DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.  
ramirez@star-telegram.com

They cashed checks at a rate of \$5,000 to \$15,000 per day.

They bought luxury cars such as Lexuses, Mercedes and BMWs.

And their main hangouts were Dallas strip clubs.

Using information from 100 sailors and reservists at two Texas military bases, members of the ID theft ring scammed nearly \$2 million to underwrite their lifestyle, authorities said Thursday.



This BMW is among eight cars seized by authorities when the suspects were arrested last year. EULESS POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Theft ring

Eules police and federal authorities identified the main suspects in the theft ring:



Wills

**Seneca Wills, 26, DeSoto:** Authorities said he was the ringleader. He was living in Eules at the time investigators believe the ring was in operation last year.

Wills is accused of going to homeless shelters in Dallas and recruiting residents to cash the fraudulent checks. Wills' attorney, Michael Todd, declined to comment on the case Thursday.



Dixon

**Cora Dixon, 33, DeSoto:** Police say the former Navy petty officer had access to direct deposits at the Fort Worth Reserve Joint Base. Wills was her boyfriend, and they were living in Eules last year.

Dixon is accused of taking banking and personal information from the sailors and reservists to make fraudulent checks and identification cards.

The information, which included bank account numbers, driver's license numbers and Social Security numbers, was taken from the Fort Worth base and a San Antonio base, authorities said.

After her arrest, Dixon was discharged under other than honorable conditions, police said. Dixon's attorney, Michael Heiskell, did not return a call for comment Thursday.



Long

**Zachariah Long, 29, Irving:** According to police, Long made the fraudulent checks for the homeless residents to cash. He remained in the Tarrant County Jail on Thursday with bail set at \$25,000. He also has a hold from the Dallas County Sheriff's Department. Through jail officials, he declined an interview Thursday.



Mitchell

**Angel R. Mitchell, 22, Dallas:** The former Bank of America teller is accused of giving Wills information about how much money was available in the accounts of sailors and reservists. Police say she provided that information at \$100 per account. Mitchell could not be reached for comment and has no attorney listed in court records.

**James Dean Miller, 44, of Justin, and Lester**

**Conlon, 38, of Garland:** According to police, the men were runners who cashed some of the checks.

Conlon got involved in the scheme after losing his mortgage-industry job, according to his lawyer, Gary Smart. Conlon is cooperating with investigators and hopes to reach a plea agreement, Smart said. Miller could not be reached for comment and has no attorney listed in court records.

All of the suspects except for Long were free Thursday on a variety of bail amounts.

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They had information on 8,000, police said.

The ring, led by six people, often relied on more than 70 homeless men and women in Dallas to cash the fraudulent checks. The homeless were paid with cash and drugs, police said.

All have been arrested, and the six leaders are awaiting trial in Tarrant County on charges of engaging in organized criminal activity.

Authorities arrested members last year, but they only released information about the case this week.

"The Navy was concerned about releasing the information, and we wanted to be sure we had all the work done on the case before we released any information," Euless police Detective Brian Brennan said Thursday.

Police believe members of the theft ring spent the money on trips and at Dallas strip clubs. At the time of their arrests last year, authorities seized eight cars, two motorcycles and a truck.

"They didn't have much money left when they were arrested," Brennan said Thursday. "They just blew it all."

An investigation began in January 2007 after one of the members was arrested in Irving and fraudulent checks were found in a vehicle.

Euless police along with the Secret Service and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service investigated the case.

Staff writer Kate Gorman contributed to this report.